

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 538

EC 111 939

AUTHOR Britton, John
TITLE The Handicapped Person Who Becomes a Student and a Professor.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the World Congress on Future Special Education (First, Stirling, Scotland, June 25 - July 1, 1978)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Federal Legislation; Handicapped; *Higher Education; *Physically Handicapped; Post Secondary Education; *Student Rights.
IDENTIFIERS *Rehabilitation Act 1973 Section 504

ABSTRACT

A physically disabled university professor discusses the obligations of higher education toward disabled persons and the concomitant responsibilities of disabled students. Implications of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are considered. (CL)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Professor John Britton M.D.(R). D.Sc., F.I.C.T.R.

JOHN BRITTON
No. Illinois Univ
DeKalb. IL. 60115

.23'

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

The Handicapped Person Who Becomes A Student and A Professor

AUG 21 1978

One man was in a wheelchair, one had a back injury, two had heart conditions. But because the names were Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Kennedy--and because they developed their disabilities later in life--these men were never called handicapped. They were called "Mr. President."

Twenty-five to thirty million Americans are not so lucky. One out of 11 Americans is called "handicapped" as a result of a physical or mental condition which limits some of their activities.

And in the case of the handicapped in America, if you have the name, you are out of the game. Out of jobs, out of schools, out of opportunities which other Americans take for granted. Or are you?

Concerned as we are today with the academic advisement of the disabled student, is this another piece in the developing mosaic of national concern for a vast group of individuals in the society who must be brought to the maximum of their intellectual and working potential? The economies of the problem dictate this action if for no other reason. The United States has always been typified by a humanitarian point of view, but the point of view and reputation has often exceeded the reality of our national program. The disabled person finds himself in a minority group which is often just as segregated, if not many times more so, than groups whose characteristic is one of race, religion, or sex.

However, since the early part of this decade, changing attitudes have begun to appear in large numbers of our people which more nearly equates disability with normalcy and this attitude permits the integration of the

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CEC

2

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

(C)

ED158538

FC111939

disabled person more fully into our elementary and secondary schools, into industry and business, and in a lesser extent to date into colleges and universities. The society of which we are a part can ill afford to compliment itself yet on having achieved a high level of humanitarian acceptance insofar as the disabled is concerned. There is too much selfishness yet which is basic to what is being done, too much misguided effort in too many communities, too little understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the handicapped as well as the rights and responsibilities of others toward the handicapped. The handicapped still suffer indignities at the hands of persons who should know and judge more accurately.

The title of the topic on which I have been asked to speak concerns itself more personally with obligations and expectancies of the disabled person in the educational process. I am presuming that this pertains essentially to the educational process in higher education and it is this level of education to which I have directed my thinking.

It is my considered opinion that the disabled person has a right to certain expectancies in higher education, and from the administrators of higher education. He has a right to expect to receive the same considerations as are received by all students, the right to receive the same privileges as are accorded to all students, the right to succeed or fail in the same degree as is accorded to all students. The disabled person is a bona fide member of our society. I am one of you. Physically, I cannot be different than I am. As men generally have a right to expect certain things of their society so does the disabled. As women have a right generally to expect certain things of their society so does the disabled. As those with certain dietary laws have a right to expect that their beliefs

will be recognized, so does the disabled. As Catholics have a right to expect that religious freedom will be accepted on any campus, so the disabled have rights to expect that their needs will be accepted. As Jews rightfully expect that their worship services can be on Friday evenings instead of Sundays as Catholics and Protestants have a right to expect, so the disabled has the right to expect that his unique needs will be accepted and planned for. His needs are no different in principal from the needs of the Jewish, the Catholic, or the Moslem student. American universities have gone out of their way to attract foreign students to their campuses. Special counselors cater to their needs. Special religious provisions are made. Special social groups are organized to serve the needs of these students. Oftentimes special foods are prepared or the students are provided facilities wherein they can prepare their own. These are students with unique needs who, in our concept of world-wide educational responsibility, we have attracted to our educational settings. The disabled has the right to expect that his needs, which are of a different order and often of a different degree, will be accepted and met with equal enthusiasm also.

To what extent are universities rising to meet these needs whatever they may be? We have too little objective data to know, but what data I recently collected does not present a favorable picture. In a recent survey done just before Section 504 for my Project BRITTON, 1000 universities in the United States provided some statistical and descriptive data as to their facilities for physically handicapped students. In this number of colleges and universities there were 934 students in wheelchairs enrolled in 298 institutions of higher education, of which 115 such students were reported in a single institution. Of the institutions reporting, 680 did not enroll any seriously physically handicapped persons. The disabled in America ought to expect at

least equal educational opportunities to choose and select a university in a land which brags of the fact that equality is a cornerstone of our democratic concept and is so bending to do with the mandates of Section 504 at the current time. Nondisabled students can go to and are accepted into 1000 institutions of higher education; seriously disabled, into only 298 of them.

In this same survey 1,136 blind students are enrolled in 499 universities from the total group of 1000 institutions. This is a better picture, but it is not a good one--not one about which Americans can be really proud.

Let us look more specifically at the wheelchair students for a moment further. These are students with specific needs without a question. Their needs, like the blind, will involve mobility. Of the 1000 institutions, 81 report having on-campus housing ramps. Of the 1000 institutions, 133 report having classroom ramps. One hundred, 10%, report ramps to libraries. Of the 1000 institutions, 266 indicate that they make available a reserved parking area for these students. One very special and very personal need of individuals in wheelchairs pertains to toilet facilities. Where are the toilet facilities in the building in which you have your offices? How accessible are these to persons in wheelchairs? Of the institutions of higher education reporting, only 53 indicated the availability of modified toilet facilities for the physically disabled.

Other points could have been made, but the basic one has been made, I believe. Are universities providing those things which the physically disabled student has a right to expect in order to receive an equal opportunity for education foregoing Section 504? One wonders how many of the 499 institutions of higher education which serve some blind students have in their

libraries a dictionary in braille, an encyclopedia in braille. I wonder how many of you know whether or not your university possesses such resources and if so where they are in order to direct a blind student to them for important reference usage?

The disabled student has a right to expect that the tools for learning will be available to him in the university of his choice--a university which has accepted him in terms of ability and potential, not on the basis of his disability and physical characteristics. The tools for learning for the disabled are modified toilet facilities for some, a braille library for another, ramps for many, parking facilities for a large group of others. The tools for learning in a total learning environment of a modern university are the recognition of dietary laws for some students, the provision of facilities for Mass and other religious observances for still others, the freedom to object for others, the adjustment of the total university facility to religious holidays for one religion or another. We think little of these. They are a part of our culture. How many dictionaries does a university purchase in a year? And what note is made of this purchase? The purchase of a single braille dictionary in the minds of many warrants complete publicity in all the community news media. This fascination with the unusual and unique creates an unequal climate of educational opportunity. Is this an expectancy which the disabled student has a right to find in the university of his choice?

This disabled student has the right to expect still another important thing in the university of his choice, namely, that he will find an attitude of acceptance which permits equality of opportunity based on his ability and skills. I am not so naive as to think that the millennium has been achieved on this matter. University personnel--professors, administrators,

deans of men and women, chaplains, secretaries, librarians, and others who make a university run--and not forgetting peer groups--represent all the cultural stereotypes and attitudes which typify our social history. All the deep-seated Freudian-like fears of the disabled which so characterize our culture also characterize the people who work in universities. The negative connotation of the concept of disease is active in social attitudes. The lethargy of society also typifies university administration. It is essential, however, that a constant effort toward greater understanding of a point of view be achieved within a university faculty which may serve only a single student who is disabled. Intellectual ability and professional reputation are not always synonymous with humaneness.

The physically disabled in any university has a right to be accepted for what he is: to fail, to be average, to excel. He must not be treated differently from other students because he is handicapped. The disabled student has a right to feel he will be considered from the point of view of whatsoever competence he has not on the basis of a medical classification.

Northern Illinois University recently graduated approximately 3,000 students in May. Within this group there were undoubtedly dozens who represented brilliant and unique achievements, who represented striving in the face of hardship beyond all comprehension. We made nothing of these students as individuals. They were not singled out in any special way. Perhaps they should have been, but in our great leveling society they were not. As it happened, one of the students in the graduating class who earned his master's degree was blind. This young man has had an easy and personally enjoyable time at N.I.U. As Director of the Physically Handicapped programs, I received four telephone calls--at ever increasing levels in the university

hierarchy--asking me for a special news story on this young man. "Why?" I asked. "Because he is blind," I was told. "I shall be happy to write you a story about this young man in terms of his academic achievement, not as a blind person, but because he has achieved well in his graduate program." So I ask, "Did he come to Northern Illinois University because he was blind or because he thought we could give him an education? Was he admitted to our University because he was blind or because he met the minimum acceptance standards for the graduate school of education?" Let's extoll him as a student, then every student should have an equal chance to be heard and praised for their oftentime far more heroic efforts to obtain a higher education. The disabled student has a right to be accepted as a student equal to others and not to be exploited by the institution after he has achieved.

Let us go further regarding my own vocation as a Professor and Director for Programs for the Physically Handicapped. My job of Public Relations has had to be to sell myself as an able but however disabled person, not as a hard working and sometime brilliant academician and teacher. So I have to exploit that Northern Illinois University is extremely lucky in having a disabled person to teach their programs for Physically Handicapped because this has far greater effect in a news story. Is this, then, in opposition to my blind student who graduated? I can do this with confidence as I feel I can perform very adequately in terms of the expectancies of my responsibilities as a professor because I myself respond and make the climate in which I perform.

However, the disabled student cannot perform adequately in terms of our expectancies of him or in terms of his obligations to himself and society if the climate in which he attempts to perform is itself unable

to meet his expectancies of it. As a university society, then, if we truly believe in providing a place wherein qualified persons can find themselves and prepare themselves to make a contribution to the culture, we must meet the disabled students expectancies regarding attitudes toward him, physical plant facilities, learning facilities, and provide these as we would provide for the individual differences of any student in terms of sex, chronological age, race, religion, color, emotional maturity--indeed, in terms of all aspects of the spectrum of human life. This concept must be an integral part of our social and political and educational philosophy. The maturity of our society over all will be reflected in the degree to which this is accomplished.

So you will see there is the other side of the coin. There are obligations expected of the individual when he has been accepted into the fraternity of scholars. We expect a recognition of these obligations on the part of all students and we assume specific actions when they are not adequately met or recognized by the student. This group here today, more than others who might represent university families, understands the problem of student acceptance of obligations, whether they be academic, moral, religious, financial, or other. Society expects maturing and mature individuals to accept appropriate responsibilities and obligations. This, too, is an expectancy which the university may consider the physically disabled student will assume. These are general and are recognized to the point of truism. However, there are some other obligations which the university can rightfully expect the disabled student to assume, not different perhaps from all students but different in degree.

The university can expect the disabled student to accept the obligation of pursuing a rational and realistic course toward a rational and realistic goal in terms of whatsoever physical limitations there may be. We must not overlook the reality of disability, but society has the right to expect that the individual will accept the obligation of realism, too. It is my considered opinion that not all physically disabled persons should be admitted to universities or to professional schools. The blind do not necessarily make good teachers of the blind. The handicapped should not all be encouraged to become counselors of the handicapped. The fact of success of one disabled person in a given profession or trade should not become generalized to the total group of those similarly disabled. Furthermore, there is the reality of the person who is so handicapped that no gainful occupation or profession can be found for him, yet he may be intellectually very capable. What of him and what is the university's obligation? What is the individual's obligation to himself? Just as we say that not all persons can or will be admitted to a university, so it should be recognized that not all disabled individuals should go to a university even if they are intellectually qualified. There is nothing more tragic than the over-trained, severely handicapped, unemployed person. How much better might it be to provide these students a broad program of liberal arts enrichment which would provide them direction in their difficult life ahead. Do they not also have an obligation to accept reality as does society? Do not their parents have a similar obligation? Social and individual maturity may bring this acceptance ultimately. In a different degree, this is not different from the obligation of the student who has had a tumor removed from his brain and is subsequently inadequate in gross and fine motor movements and who must change his major from

physical education to another area. It is not different from the obligation of the student with severe visual problems of nystagmus to turn from his first choice of architecture to an aspect of career planning not so dependent on close vision. It is not different in kind from the obligation of the student with grand mal seizures to turn from organic chemistry, for example, as a career to something which will not expose him and others to physical danger during the period of a seizure. It is not different in kind from the obligation of a student who is a severe cardiac to refrain from thinking about active aeronautics as a career and to accept a phase of this field wherein his limitations will not be a disability to himself or to others. The disabled student has the obligation of realistically accepting the fact that all wishes cannot be fulfilled, that all the goals they set in life cannot be reached, that some people whom they meet will prove to be unsympathetic, intolerant, uncongenial, others even dishonest, untrustworthy, undependable, and indecent; that we as human beings do not know everything, cannot solve all problems relating to ourselves, to society, to the world, the universe--to realize all this and yet remain interested, ambitious, energetic within the individual's limitations. This obligation is not different than for any individual; it is different only in degree. Yet it is an obligation which universities can expect that their disabled students will and must accept.

While it can be expected by a disabled person that the university, and the people in it, will go as far as they can in making it possible for the individual to receive a valuable experience, it is the obligation of the disabled individual to assume at least 51% of this responsibility himself.

He must assume responsibility for those things which he needs in order to succeed in the instructional setting.

Further...we emphasize the fact that personal problems caused by lack of sight are strictly the concern of the blind individual and not to be imposed upon either the employer or colleagues. This puts the obligation squarely on the shoulders of the disabled where it belongs. Because I am bald, I cannot expect someone to always bring me a hat to cover my head in the sun; I have to get it myself. Because I have sight in only one eye, I cannot expect someone to drive me to and from work because depth perception is minimal; I have to learn other cues. Because I am blind or physically disabled in other ways, I cannot expect the university to provide a silver platter on which I will be then carried. As a disabled person, the student must assume and have an obligation for those special details which are inherent in his achievement. The university must provide the best possible working climate for the student; the student must meet the obligations of his disability in ways known only to himself. These must not be imposed by the student on the university; the university does a disservice if it accepts them.

As a place where young people can grow, mature, and find themselves, there is no more exciting place to be in our social arrangements. The goal of all thoughtful people in the university is to stimulate young people to learn at the maximum of their capacity. To this end, we ask that universities through their physical facilities and administrative arrangements provide an optimal setting for disabled students--a right the disabled student can expect; we then ask that the disabled student assume the responsibilities and obligations of both the student and the disability fully--a right the university can expect.

But having seen both sides of the coin, what about the rim upon where we may find some answers, such as the enacted Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

In 1973, landmark legislation was passed by the United States Congress to protect and promote the rights of the disabled. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 stated that the federal government, all who work under federal contracts, and all who receive federal funds must take positive steps to end discrimination against the handicapped.

Section 503 of the Act specifically requires that any contractor or sub-contractor doing business with the federal government, in excess of \$2,500 annually, must have an affirmative action program for the handicapped. On April 16, 1976, the Department of Labor issued final regulations for enforcement which made the message clear. To be in compliance with the law, companies must show concrete efforts to recruit, hire, promote and accommodate the handicapped. Facilities must be made accessible. Personnel systems must be reviewed and revamped, if necessary, to end systematic exclusion of disabled applicants. Recruiting efforts must be undertaken to reach out to handicapped people who have never had the opportunity to get through the personnel office door, let alone into the jobs that lay beyond it.

Section 504 was even broader in scope. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare estimates that 16,000 school districts, 8,000 colleges and universities, countless hospitals and other institutions will have to conform to the provision, which expressly prohibits discrimination against the disabled by any entity receiving federal assistance.

The Rehabilitation Act defines a handicapped individual as a person with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities. A person is also considered handicapped if he or she has a record of such an impairment by the general public.

Some quarreled with the definition of the handicapped; but few questioned the opportunities offered by the legislation. For one of 11 Americans, the Rehabilitation Act was an open invitation to enter the mainstream of American life.